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SUBJECT: AMBASSADOR OBSITNIK'S COURTESY CALL ON INTERIOR
MINISTER KALINAK

REF: BRATISLAVA 9

Classified By: Ambassador Vincent Obsitnik, for reasons 1.4 b and d

¶1. (C) Summary. Ambassador Obsitnik and Interior Minister Robert Kalinak discussed the Visa Waiver Program, border security, fighting extremism, and controversial pending NGO legislation in a 90-minute conversation January 17 -- including a 20 minute one-on-one. Minister Kalinak welcomed plans for an upcoming visit by State Department and DHS officials to begin discussions on an information exchange (TSC) agreement. Kalinak also expressed interest in exploring ways to market in the U.S. new technology developed by a Slovak company that he believes could be an excellent tool for combatting human smuggling and illegal immigration. On other topics, Kalinak described recent steps the Ministry has taken to address extremist and race-related attacks, including the creation of a multi-disciplinary expert group that partners law enforcement and NGOs and anti-extremist units in police departments. In response to Ambassador Obsitnik's questions regarding the Ministry's draft law on NGOs, Kalinak claimed that the government had no intent to restrict civil society or take any anti-democratic steps that would abridge human rights or freedoms. The government's interest, he said, is in knowing who is behind each organization so that it can trace financing and prevent abuses or possible terrorist involvement. Kalinak said the current draft would be amended, laying blame for its flaws on the doorstep of the "bureaucrats" who drafted it. End Summary.

VWP

¶2. (C) The Ambassador congratulated Minister Kalinak on entry into Schengen and on the recent introduction of e-passports in Slovakia, urging the GOS to promote the new passports as a pre-requisite for visa-free travel. Kalinak stressed that the systems put in place pursuant to Schengen requirements provide for high levels of security, particularly on the eastern border, as well as for the rapid exchange of information. He said that while Slovakia is not a target for terrorism since it is not "a symbol of the West," he does not want it to become a "shopping mall" where terrorists can obtain materials for use in attacks elsewhere. He cited the cooperation between Slovakia and Hungary -- and subsequently with the U.S. -- on the uranium smuggling incident last November as a model for future efforts.

¶3. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik briefed Minister Kalinak on his recent consultations with U.S. officials on VWP, underscoring

the commitment of the White House and that of all involved agencies to facilitate VWP expansion as soon as possible. He also informed Kalinak about the two agreements that the U.S. would like to begin negotiating with Slovakia: a terrorist information exchange (TSC) agreement and a memorandum of understanding on security cooperation covering other types of info-sharing, including on lost and stolen passports, passengers, etc. Kalinak indicated the GOS would welcome visit from State Department and DHS representatives in the near future to tackle both of these issues. Kalinak described the VWP as primarily an issue of "mutual confidence and trust." Once a country is secure, he added, there should be "no question" about participation.

14. (C) Returning to the issue of security now that Slovakia represents the edge of Schengen along the border with Ukraine, Minister Kalinak described with great enthusiasm the development by a Slovak company of technology capable of very rapidly identifying humans hidden in containers. According to Kalinak, the system uses radio waves that can distinguish humans from animals and has applications for search and rescue missions, too. The smaller version of the device is relatively inexpensive (approximately 200,000 USD). Kalinak offered to set up a demonstration for Ambassador Obsitnik, and expressed interest in exporting the technology to the U.S.

The Fight Against Extremism

15. (C) Ambassador Obsitnik praised Kalinak for the recent opening of an anti-extremist unit in the Bratislava police department. Kalinak provided his perspective on the nature of the problem in Slovakia, characterizing it as a phenomenon primarily involving disaffected youth. Skinheads and neo-Nazis are the most prevalent, but Kalinak claimed the

problem is neither more serious or widespread today than it was in the past. Perceptions of an increase in incidents are driven by greater media interest and coverage. Nevertheless, on the theory that "all terrorists used to be extremists," the Slovak government is undertaking new initiatives to combat the problem. In addition to the new anti-extremist units, this week the government established a multi-disciplinary expert group comprised of law enforcement officers, prosecutors and NGOs to work toward the "elimination of extremism and racially-motivated crime." (Comment: these are welcome developments and we will monitor the progress/results of these initiatives.)

NGO Law

16. (C) Kalinak gave an impassioned, if not entirely convincing, explanation of the government's aims in connection with the Interior Ministry's draft law on NGOs (reftel). He claimed that the GOS has no desire to curtail the rights of legitimate NGOs. The goal of the new law, he explained, is simply to provide the government with an overview of "who the NGOs are, and what they do," and in particular to guarantee transparency with respect to financing. Kalinak twice referred to U.S. law regarding NGOs as "stricter" than this draft and Ambassador Obsitnik countered that U.S. laws focus primarily on the tax status and do not speak to issues such as funding, membership or activities. Kalinak complained that there are currently too many types of NGO permitted under the law, and that the government merely wanted to streamline and standardize the current system. Some civic associations, he added, are actually operating as businesses and some may just be "dead post boxes" receiving illicit funds. Kalinak also made a vague reference to approximately 50 NGOs that may have Islamist ties. Kalinak essentially blamed the controversy over the law on the "bureaucrats" who drafted it and a lack of careful analysis on the part of the NGO community. He said the draft would be amended.

17. (C) In the one-on-one meeting that followed the larger

meeting, Minister Kalinak assured the Ambassador in unequivocal terms that the GOS has no intent of adopting anti-democratic measures or curtailing the rights of NGOs or the press. Comment: The concerns that Kalinak outlined to the Ambassador echo what he told NGO representatives in their January 8 meeting. However, they are not consistent with the provisions of the draft law. As reported reftel, the draft could make it impossible -- either for legal or practical reasons -- for many NGOs, particularly watchdog organizations, to operate. At the same time, legitimate concerns about potential financial abuses, could be addressed in existing tax and NGO laws. The next step in the process will occur at the end of the month, when the Ministry will present a new justification for its proposal. At that time, we should have a clearer sense regarding the extent to which Kalinak and Fico are willing to alter the legislation. All of Kalinak's statements to date, including to the Ambassador, suggest that he does not intend to withdraw the draft, but rather amend it. NGO leaders believe the text to be so problematic that they fear that the end result of any process will result in significant problems for NGOs. However, it is clear that the Ambassador's conversations regarding the matter with both Minister Kalinak and FM Kubis (with whom the Ambassador spoke following the MOI meeting) have made an impression and that the GOS is anxious to dispel any perceptions of an anti-democratic approach to civil society. We will keep Washington informed of further developments.

OBSITNIK